

## CLARENDON PARK COMMUNITY CENTER, Notes for Visitors and Docents

### Overview of Historic Building

- Chicago's public bathing movement began in the 1890s. The Free Bath and Sanitary League formed in 1894. The organization called for free showers and bathing beaches. Though a Lincoln Park beach opened at the foot of Diversey Pkwy, the movement gained momentum after the Reversal of the Chicago River in 1900. This helped divert pollution away from Lake Michigan.
- The City of Chicago formed a Special Park Commission (SPC) in 1898. The SPC functioned as the city's Bureau of Parks and Recreation. The SPC asked to study bathing facilities in other cities in 1905. Members visited places with good bathing facilities such as Atlantic City to get ideas for Chicago municipal beaches.
- In April 1908 neighbors in what is today the eastern side of Uptown formed the East Sheridan Park Protective and Improvement Association (ESPPIA) to fight permits for a privately run beach on the site of what is today Weiss Hospital. Representing "about 5,000 owners and tenants" in the district, ESPPIA mounted a petition drive that garnered 1,100 signatures challenged the permits for Wilson Beach in court.
- In May 1908, ESPPIA passed a resolution stating that it endorsed and favored "the establishing of free bathing beaches along the north shore for the use of the general public, operated and controlled by the city of Chicago . . ."
- The City began acquiring the site in the ESPPIA community for the Clarendon Bathing Facility in 1913. City authorized bonds to purchase site in 1914, and Charles W. Kallal, the City Architect, prepared plans.
- Kallal (1873–1926) had been in private partnership with another architect, Joseph Molitor from 1896 to 1907. (St. Vitus Church at 18th and Paulina is their work). Kallal became City Architect in 1908 and served in the position until his death in 1926. He designed many handsome brick fire stations and pumping stations in Chicago.
- Special Parks Commission opened Clarendon Municipal Beach Bathing Pavilion in 1916.
- Clarendon Beach was touted by the Chicago Plan as its proof of concept for a wholly public lakefront park. Undertaken by the CPC's head, Charles Wacker, this campaign for a public lakefront for the "health and happiness" of all Chicagoans was highlighted in hundreds of publications, from newspapers across the country to *National Geographic* to the CPC's instructional book for Chicago schoolchildren, *Wacker's Manual*. The caption of a representative photo in *Wacker's Manual* reads:  
  
"Clarendon Beach. Tens of thousands in the water at Clarendon Beach (1916). Twenty---three thousand bathers have visited this single beach in one day. What better argument could possibly be had for the 'Reclamation of the Lake Front for the People?'"
- Described in the press as "a winter community center" and an idea "new to Chicago," year-round programming in the beach facility was inaugurated on Sept. 24, 1917, with 37,000 free admissions recorded in the first fall/winter season. Day and evening activities ranged from athletics like basketball, boxing, and ice skating to club rooms for community groups and classes designed and taught especially for women. As in the summer beach facility, childcare was offered.

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### Details of Original Beach and Community Center Facility

- Men and women's lockers and dressing rooms were built of reinforced concrete because wood rots and is considered too unsanitary.
- 9,000 lockers for adults and 2,100 for children
- A nursery facility was included in order to allow woman in particular to visit the beach.
- 85 employees: 1 director, 3 asst. directors, 16 lifeguards, 26 male & 16 female attendants, 6 laundrymen & 17 laundresses
- Swimsuit, towel, and locker rental was 10 cents for adults, free for those under 15. The city intended to offer better facilities than adjoining private beaches where costs were 25 to 50 cents.
- Bathers and spectators were strictly segregated. No one in a bathing costume allowed on the promenade, spectators not allowed in locker area or beach.
- 410,000 people used facility in its first 2 ½ month season June 30–Sept 17, 1916. Another 100,000 came via the openings along the beach. Total visitation was half a million in the first year.
- Night-time lighting illuminated 12 acres of beach and water so those employed during the day could safely enjoy evening bathing and night-time ice skating in winter.

### Clarendon Park Community Center: Advocacy and Adaptive Reuse

- The Lincoln Park Extension carried out under the Works Progress Administration and Public Works Administration meant that Clarendon was no longer beachside by 1931. Its summertime beach functions were shifted to new Montrose Beach, the largest manmade beach in the country in that era.
- In 1929, community members and alderman fought the sale of Clarendon, advocating to retain the beach as public land and a possible location for "a city college similar to those in other large cities."
- The City of Chicago continued to use the building as a community center until 1959, when it was transferred to Chicago Park District, which had been established in 1934, after a proposed land exchange with the Board of Education in 1959 was scuttled, again after local advocacy to retain the site.
- In 1948 a group of 15 Seebees renovated the former laundry of the Clarendon Beach facility, undertaking extension renovation to create the Uptown Edgewater Teen-Age Center.
- A 1972 renovation removed the building's 3rd floor, tile roof, and towers, moving the entrance and adding a gym. The new facility has continued to serve the Uptown community since this time.
- Ongoing community advocacy and a petition drive that garnered ca. 3,000 signatures led to an extensive Chicago Park District study of options for Clarendon Park's facility, including interviews and meetings with stakeholders in small and large groups. The Chicago Park District and the greater Clarendon Park community teamed up to work together towards renovating the historic building. Work will begin in 2021 with funding from the Montrose Clarendon and the Wilson Yard TIF districts.

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### Downstairs

- Founded in 1947, the Garfield---Clarendon Model Railroad Club

(<http://www.garfieldcentral.org/>) moved from Garfield Park Fieldhouse to Clarendon Park in 1963. When the building was remodeled in 1972–1973, the Club moved to their current space in what was originally a general storage room below the grand entrance to Clarendon Municipal Bathing Beach.

- Construction of the Club’s current layout began in 1974 and includes 1,400 feet of hand---laid track. The layout is 100% digital command controlled, has 3 large bridges, fully signaled dual

main lines, both urban and rural scenery, and a streetcar line with two cars. If operated as scale speed, a complete round trip takes 25 minutes!

- Changing priorities over the decades are reflected in changing uses of parts of the building:

On the northwest corner of the building, the room that was the Women’s Check Room in 1916 became the “Senior Citizens Room” in the 1972 renovations that also removed the building’s third floor (called the “Second Floor” in the original 1916 plans). In 1972 Uptown had a high number of senior residents. Today the room is Clarendon Park’s children’s playroom used for afterschool and tot programming.

Today’s entrance to the community center was the “Men’s Entrance” for the original beach facility. The Men’s Check Room on the southwest corner is Clarendon Park’s office today.

The current Game Room was envisioned in 1916 as the site of future swimming pool and the Beach House promenade ran through today’s gymnasium.

Ghost stairs lead up the wall of what was originally the southeast tower of the beach house.

### Upstairs

- Clarendon Park Arts Partner Kuumba Lynx (<http://www.kuumbalynx.com/>) holds programming in what was the original 1916 building’s “first floor” Lobby space.

- Kuumba Lynx is an urban arts youth development organization founded in 1996 by Jaquanda Villegas, Leida Garcia-Mukwacha, and Jacinda Bullie. KL provides performances & productions, film screenings, art-making workshops & residencies, youth artist apprenticeships, community cultural events (battles, exhibitions, festivals & poetry slams), and praxi sharing, all rooted in an indigenous culture of urban artistry and activism.

- Administrative offices on the southeast and northeast corners of the 1916 building became a meeting room (NE corner) and a boxing equipment and training room in 1972 (SE corner). Clarendon Park was home in 1970s and 1980s to a well---known boxing program that ran 5 days a week and hosted the city---wide Junior Boxing Tournament. Today these spaces have been transformed again as Kuumba Lynx’s office and program space.

- Clarendon Park’s “Art Room” today, located on the northwest corner of the “second floor,” was originally a “Wardrobe” on the “first floor” in the 1916 Municipal Beach House. This room and the one on the southwest corner of the original building were also described in a 1916 article as intended as

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“reading rooms” for the Public Library. Both became Meeting Rooms in the redesign in 1972, which offered meeting rooms in many parts of the building. Today the term “club room” is again in use at the Park District, a recurrence of the original terminology of the year-round community center in 1917.

Today you can still see an exterior wall and experience the original ceiling height of the Beach facility in the Kuumba Lynx performance space, which hosted an extensive boxing program in era after WW2.

### Outdoors

- The Women’s side of Clarendon Municipal Beach Pavilion was located on the north side of the building. Lockers extended west of where we have the north softball field today. A kindergarten was located at the northernmost point, near to the current Lakeview Pumping Station.
- The Men’s side of the Beach Pavilion was located on the south side of the pavilion building and the men’s lockers were located where today we have a grassy area, permeable parking lot, and Clarendon Park Community Garden. A laundry was located approximately where the basketball court is today at the south end of the lockers. The wall where Kuumba Lynx’s mural Peace Love Respect is painted marks the west edge of the original men’s locker facility.
- Along with other leagues, the Chicago Theater Softball League has been playing at Clarendon Park for decades—on fields built in the early 1930s on top of Clarendon Municipal Bathing Beach. From 1950 through the 1970s, these fields hosted ice skating, including Chicago Public Schools speedskating championships and the Western Open and Erickson Skating Meets at which future Olympians competed.
- On the west side of on Clarendon, a glass tile mural titled *Lily Birth and Rebirth* was installed in 2000 by Patricia Murphy and Julia Sowles-Barlow, assisted by Ginny Sykes and youth from Gallery 37. Replicating the effect of a watercolor painting with glass, multi-color tile adorns the pavilion’s entrance colonnade that was originally hidden by the portico removed in 1972.
- The current entrance garden north of the playground is in the same spot shown as the site of a garden planned in 1915. A setback of 50 feet from Clarendon Avenue, per the 1912 City Manual, left “sufficient space properly to ornament with flowers and shrubbery.”
- The second Lake View Pumping Station, built in 1907–1915 and demolished in 1978–1979, was located where Clarendon Park’s tennis courts and soccer field are today along Montrose Avenue. Excess steam from the pumping station powered the beach facility laundry. Plans described in the 1912 City Manual indicate that the laundry could wash, dry, and sterilize swimsuits up to 6 times a day.

Source: Clarendon Park Advisory Council, June 2021